

## Memorandum for:

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## WESTERN EUROPE: PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD TERRORISM

Summary

According to public opinion surveys commissioned by USIA in the spring of 1985, the publics in Britain, France, Italy, and West Germany are clearly concerned about terrorism and how their governments respond to it. On balance, West European publics appear to be ahead of their governments in wanting firmer responses to terrorism at home and abroad. [redacted]

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Attitudes Toward Terrorists

Majorities in all four countries appear to favor tough counterterrorist measures as well as greater international cooperation against terrorism.

- Three-fourths of respondents in three of the survey countries and a clear majority in France (56 percent) favor giving police special powers to seek out terrorists.
- Strong majorities in all four countries (from 71 percent in West Germany to 80 percent in Britain) overwhelmingly disapprove of giving in to terrorist demands.
- Firm majorities in all of the countries except France believe their governments should increase spending on intelligence-gathering to counteract terrorism.
- Eighty-five percent of the publics in Britain, Italy, and West Germany, and 54 percent in France believe their governments should coordinate their counterterrorist policies with other countries, and similar majorities favor sharing terrorist-related intelligence with other countries.
- Three-fourths of those polled in Britain, France and West Germany -- and even more in Italy (88 percent) -- think their governments should extradite terrorists to the country in which the terrorist act was committed.

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This typescript was prepared by [redacted] the  
Office of European Analysis [redacted]  
[redacted] Questions and comments may be directed to [redacted]  
[redacted] Chief of the European Issues Division, [redacted]

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Awareness of Foreign Supporters of Terrorism

When asked which foreign countries (from a list of eight choices) "actively promote and support terrorist activities in other countries," Libya and Iran led the pack.

- A greater proportion of respondents in all four countries (ranging from 67 percent in Britain to 44 percent in Italy) cited Tripoli as responsible for terrorism, and a similar segment of these publics (from 53 percent in France to 37 percent in Italy) named Tehran.
- Similarly, majorities in all four countries think Libya and Iran provide weapons, financial aid, and training to terrorist organizations active in Europe.

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Preferred Responses Against Foreign Sponsors of Terrorism

Most respondents in all four countries nevertheless prefer their governments to limit their reactions against countries that harbor or support terrorists to diplomatic pressure. Still, significant minorities do favor either economic sanctions or military retaliation. Virtually no one favors doing nothing.

- Majorities in Britain and Italy (62 percent) and West Germany (56 percent), and a plurality in France (41 percent), support diplomatic pressure as the preferred recourse. One-fifth to one-third of the respondents in these countries favor economic sanctions, while smaller, but still significant numbers (11 percent on average) prefer to retaliate militarily, with the Italians and the French in the lead.

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With regard to how the United States should respond to terrorist attacks against its personnel or facilities abroad, West Europeans again favor diplomatic moves over economic sanctions or military retaliation. Taken together, however, support for the latter two is substantial.

- Majorities in Britain (62 percent) and Italy (61 percent) along with pluralities in West Germany (49 percent) and France (43 percent) believe the US should resort to diplomatic pressure.
- Although fewer respondents in Italy and France (21 and 26 percent, respectively) think economic sanctions are desirable, fully one-third of those surveyed in both Britain and West Germany support them.
- Again, military retaliation against terrorists elicits the least support, with 13 percent of the respondents on average favoring retaliatory strikes against terrorists.

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